An Inscribed Lintel from Bet Guvrin
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An Inscribed Lintel from Bet Guvrin

I. Introduction

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II. The Decoration

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III. The Greek Inscription

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I. INTRODUCTION

In May 1980 a tractor digging trenches near Kibbutz Bet Guvrin unearthed a decorated lintel with a Greek inscription (Pl. 8:A-B).[1] The site of discovery, south of the kibbutz, was on the borders of the ancient city of Bet Guvrin–Eleutheropolis (map ref. 140 112), probably where the road from Jerusalem–Aelia Capitolina reached the town. Many other ancient remains have turned up during recent years in the immediate area, among them a marble column and capital and fragments of walls. Twenty-eight coins collected near the site were not found *in situ*, and therefore cannot be used as evidence for the date of the lintel.[2] However, the numbers of third and fourth–fifth-century coins, 10 and 8 respectively, support the general dating to the fourth century as suggested below by Fischer and Tsafrir (below, pp. 32, 34).

The lintel was made of a hard limestone not typical of the region of Bet Guvrin. Its length is 2.75 m., its width 0.54 m. and its height 0.75 m. Remains of red colour can still be seen in the incised letters of the inscription.

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[1] Y. Dagan: *Shephelat Yehudah*, Tel Aviv, 1982, pp. 73–74 (Hebrew).

[2] R. Barkai: *A Numismatic Report on the Coins Found near the Lintel*, in *ibid.*, pp. 83–87.

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II. THE DECORATION*

The lintel is composed of an architrave and a frieze (Pl. 8:A). The architrave shows three fasciae with a Greek inscription incised on the upper and middle members. The underside of the architrave, the soffit, is adorned with vegetal patterns arranged within rectangular frames. Narrow mouldings of elongated bead-and-reel (astragal) separate each of the fasciae. The upper part of the architrave, in its transition to the frieze, is crowned with a twisted rope moulding and a row of egg-and-tongue (ovolo) motif. The rear face of the architrave is also worked and is divided into three fasciae separated from one another by astragal (Pl. 8:B).

The frieze consists of a series of eleven elliptical medallions, alternately horizontal and vertical. The edges of the vertical medallions overlie the ends of the horizontal ones. The two end medallions are circled with foliage, which springs out of scalloped acanthus leaves. These acanthus leaves also separate the side medallions from the neighbouring ones. This floral design gives a vegetal and somewhat naturalistic character to the sides of the frieze.

In the vertical medallions are nude, winged erotes, each armed with a lance or a spear, running towards the centre. The central figure runs to the viewer's right. In the horizontal medallions are wild animals which are identifiable from left to right as a wild boar, a panther(?), a lion, an unidentified animal and a wild boar.[3] The animals move away from the centre of the frieze. The rear face of the frieze is worked only in a preliminary, crude fashion. The architectural design of the fragment and the fact that an inscription is carved on the fasciae of the architrave indicate that it was part of the monumental façade of a building,[4] which is mentioned in the inscription (see below). It is possible that originally it belonged to the same architectural complex as columns and capitals which were found nearby. In the left side of the rear face is a depression about 40 cm. deep, presumably for attachment to a wall.

The scheme of monolithic architrave and frieze was widespread in Roman monumental architecture; many examples are found in Greece, Asia Minor, Italy, North Africa, Syria and Palestine.[5] The fact that the fragment is executed in a local

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* I thank Michal Peleg for her help in translating and editing the text of this section.

[3] I thank D. Bar-Shahal of the Department of Zoology, Tel Aviv University, who identified the animals. Mr. Bar-Shahal emphasized the naturalistic character of the representation.

[4] Probably a lintel, in spite of the fact that unlike the common shape of lintels, in our example the mouldings do not make a turn of 90° at the two ends of the detail and do not continue down to the jambs. On the design of doorways, see D.E. Strong: Some Observations on Early Roman Corinthian, *Journal of Roman Studies* 53 (1963), pp. 73–84; A. Büsing-Kolbe: Frühe griechische Türen, *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 93 (1978), pp. 66–174. I will deal with the design of monumental doorways in Roman Palestine in M. Fischer *et al.*: The Roman Temple at Kedesh (Upper Galilee), *Tel Aviv* (1984), forthcoming. For doorways of Galilean synagogues, see H. Kohl and C. Watzinger: *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea*, Leipzig, 1916, Figs. 114–115, 163–164, 174–175, 181–182, 196.

[5] T. Wiegand (ed.): *Baalbek. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1898 bis 1905*, Berlin, 1921–1923, I, Fig. 163, Pls. 77–79; II, Pl. 27; C.F. Leon: *Die Bauornamentik des Trajansforum und ihre Stellung in der früh- und mittelkaiserzeitlichen Architekturdekoration Roms*,

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stone and not in imported marble indicates a provincial expression of imperial art.[6] The capitals found near the fragment are of the Corinthian order. The bases of the leaves are attached to the body of the capital in a net-like pattern. The tips of the leaves are elongated and a deep depression runs along their centre. Deep channels separate each of the vegetal elements. The workmanship recalls Roman reliefs but lacks their plasticity. These features connect our capitals with a series of Corinthian capitals dated to the second half of the third century C.E.[7] The design of the architrave, the combination of the architrave with the frieze and the Corinthian capitals indicate that the building was in Corinthian style.

During the Hellenistic and Early Imperial periods, architraves were usually crowned with ovolo and anthemion,[8] whereas the combination of the twisted rope and the ovolo as an element in the crowning of the architrave appeared only at the end of the Roman period.[9] Until then, the rope was usually only a part of the decoration of the lower annulet of pilaster capitals.[10] The rope also appears in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods (fourth–seventh centuries) on the abacus of the Corinthian capital.[11] The type of ovolo on our architrave is characteristic of the third century C.E. onwards: the egg is large and prominent and is almost entirely separated from the wide shell; the separating annulets, in the form of wide leaves, are simply designed.[12] The design of the astragal recalls examples of the second half of the third century C.E.[13]

Vienna, 1971, pp. 59–60, Type B, Pls. 5:2 and 10:2; M. Lyttelton: *Baroque Architecture in Classical Antiquity*, London, 1974, Figs. 185–186 (Aspendus), 205 (Corinth). For Syria, see T. Wiegand (ed.): *Palmyra. Ergebnisse der Expeditionen von 1902 und 1917*, I, Berlin, 1932, Figs. 106, 109–110; D. Krencker and W. Zschietzschmann: *Römische Tempel in Syrien*, I, Berlin, 1938, p. 42, Fig. 61:d; p. 77, Fig. 106; p. 82, Fig. 115; see also P. Collart and J. Vicari: *Le sanctuaire de Baalshamin à Palmyre*, II, Rome, 1969, Pls. VIII:18–20, LXXIX:6.

[6] M. Fischer: *The Development of the Corinthian Capital in Palestine from its Beginnings until the Constantinian Period*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1979 (Hebrew), Vol. II, pp. xvii, xxiv–xxv (English summary); idem, *Der korinthische Baustil im hellenistischen und römischen Palästina*, Mainz (forthcoming).

[7] Idem, The Corinthian Capitals of the Capernaum Synagogue — A Late Roman Architectural Feature in Eretz-Israel, *EI* 17 (1984), pp. 308–311 (Hebrew); idem, The Corinthian Capitals of the Capernaum Synagogue: A Revision, *Levant* (1986) (forthcoming).

[8] G. Gruben: *Die Tempel der Griechen*, Munich, 1976, p. 382, Fig. 317 (Priene); Lyttelton (above, n. 5), pp. 253, 273 (astragal and ovolo common crown mouldings in Asia Minor); Wiegand (above, n. 5, *Baalbek*), II, Figs. 12, 163 (ovolo and anthemion).

[9] E.g. in unpublished architectural details of the theatres at Caesarea and Beth Shean–Scythopolis.

[10] D. Schlumberger: Les formes anciennes du chapiteau corinthien en Syrie, en Palestine et en Arabie, *Syria* 14 (1933), pp. 311–312, Pls. XXXIV:3, XXXVI:1; Fischer (above, n. 7, 1984), Pls. 38:4–6 (Capernaum).

[11] R. Kautzsch: *Kapitellstudien*, Berlin, 1936, Nos. 9, 154:b–c, 186:a–b, 198; I. Nicolajević-Stojković: *La décoration architecturale sculptée de l'époque bas-romaine en Macédonie, en Serbie et en Monténégro*, Belgrade, 1957, Figs. 32, 34, 36–37.

[12] E. Weigand: Baalbek, Datierung und kunstgeschichtliche Stellung seiner Bauten, *Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 2 (1924–1925), pp. 169–172.

[13] Astragals quite commonly separate the fasciae; for the shape of these astragals, see D.E. Strong: Late Hadrianic Architectural Ornament in Rome, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 21 (1953), Fig. 1; Weigand (above, n. 12), pp. 169–174.

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The frieze provides an example of scrolls combined with human and animal figures, which are termed 'peopled' or 'inhabited' scrolls. These were widespread as an architectural feature in the Hellenistic and Roman periods and are known in Palestine.[14] In Late Roman and Byzantine architecture this motif was still in use, though mostly in paintings and mosaics. Here we have a significant example of schematized peopled scrolls, in which the scrolls are changed into geometrical medallions.[15] This type of scroll was fairly rare in Roman architectural ornament,[16] but it is well represented in mosaics of the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.[17] The design and workmanship of the relief faithfully reflect the characteristics of classical Eastern art in Palestine: the simplicity and naivety of the carved figures; the pure profile rendering of the heavy and static animals; the oblique position of the *erotes* with the frontal upper parts and the schematic outlines of the bodies and faces. All these effects create isolated figures[18] and

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[14] J.M.C. Toynbee and L.B. Ward-Perkins: Peopled Scrolls: A Hellenistic Motif in Imperial Art, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 18 (1950), pp. 1–43; for the East, pp. 30–38. Some fine details with peopled scrolls are found at Caesarea and Beth Shean (unpublished) and on a lintel at Qedesh; Fischer *et al.* (above, n. 4); for some remarks concerning those at Beth Shean, see S. Applebaum: The Roman Theatre at Scythopolis, *Scripta Classica Israelica* 4 (1978), pp. 95–96, 101, Fig. E.

[15] Toynbee and Ward-Perkins (above, n. 14), pp. 40–43. As architectural ornament it was almost always preferred in lintels; see e.g. H.C. Butler: *Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904–1909*, Leiden, 1907, Ills. 210, 223. For some Coptic examples, see A. Effenberger: *Koptische Kunst*, Vienna, 1976, Pls. 59, 66, 68–69, 114. For mosaics, see M. Avi-Yonah: Mosaic Pavements in Palestine, *QDAP* 3 (1933), pp.66–68, reprinted in idem, *Art in Ancient Palestine*, Jerusalem, 1981 (hereafter *AAP*), pp. 368–369. For a recently discovered mosaic with peopled scrolls, see Z. Yeivin: A Third Century C.E. Mosaic from Shechem, *Qadmoniot* 29 (1975), pp. 31–34 (Hebrew); Claudine Dauphin: A Roman Mosaic Pavement from Nablus, *IEJ* 29 (1979), pp. 11–33.

[16] For the history of medallions and scrolls, see A. Riegl: *Stilfragen*, Berlin, 1893, pp. 250–257, Fig. 136, pp. 286–287, Fig. 151. For the process by which scrolls changed into a succession of circles, see M. Avi-Yonah: Oriental Elements in the Art of Palestine in the Roman and Byzantine Periods, II, *QDAP* 13 (1948), p. 157, Pl. XLVI:9 (*AAP*, p. 77, n. 7); idem, Oriental Elements in the Art of Palestine in the Roman and Byzantine Periods, III, *QDAP* 14 (1950), pp. 77–78 (*AAP*, pp. 114–115). For plain, non-vegetal medallions strips in architectural decoration, see Butler (above, n. 15), Ills. 95, 170:c (a capital); cf. Kohl and Watzinger (above, n. 4), Fig. 99:b (Chorazin); Krencker and Zschietzschmann (above, n. 5), p. 108, Fig. 144; Effenberger (above, n. 15), p. 197.

[17] M. Avi-Yonah: Mosaic Pavements in Palestine, *QDAP* 2 (1932), No. 23, pp. 146–148 (*AAP*, pp. 293–295, Pl. 49); No. 133, pp. 172–173 (*AAP*, pp. 319–320, Pls. 50–51). See also Toynbee and Ward-Perkins (above, n. 14), p. 41. Though it is difficult to point to exact parallels, the closest parallel to our detail seems to be a mosaic of the late fourth century C.E. from Trier; K. Parlasca: *Die römischen Mosaiken in Deutschland*, Berlin, 1959, p. 56, Pl. 54 ('Ellipsen und Kreise'). See also D. Levi: *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, II, Rome, 1971, Pls. CXXV:C, CXXX:A, CXXXIII:C, CXXXV:A–C; G.C. Tomasević: Mosaïques paléochrétiennes récemment découvertes à Héracleia Lynkestis, in H. Stern and M. Le Gay (eds.): *La mosaïque antique gréco-romaine*, II (*II^{e} Colloque international pour l'étude de la mosaique antique*), Paris, 1975, pp. 385–399, Pl. CLXXXVIII:1. For decoration of mosaics by interlacements, see Avi-Yonah (above, n. 15), Patterns J:1, 2, 5, pp. 66–68 (*AAP*, pp. 368–369).

[18] It is possible to point to only a few stylistic parallels among architectural details dated to the second and third centuries C.E. in Palestine and Transjordan, e.g. N. Glueck: *Deities and Dolphins*, New York, 1965, pp. 56–57, Pls. 167:c, 169:a–b (Qasr Rabbah); Kohl and Watzinger (above, n. 4), Fig. 99:b (Chorazin); M. Avi-Yonah: *Oriental Art in Roman Palestine*, Rome, 1961, pp. 34–35, Pl. IV:1–2 (*AAP*,

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a symmetrical composition, a principle which played an important role in classical art in general and found its way into the stylization of Eastern art in particular.[19]

The relief represents a hunting scene, combining isolated figures of *erotes* and wild animals. *Erotes* are often depicted as heroes of hunting scenes.[20] These scenes reflect one of the most popular leisure activities of the upper class of Roman society but at the same time are parodies of hunts in amphitheatres, entertainments which attracted all social levels and continued to be favoured in Christian Byzantine society.[21] Although in many cases there is no connection between the nature and function of Roman and Byzantine monuments with the scenes adorning them, the discovery of an amphitheatre at Bet Guvrin may be of significance in connection with our frieze.[22]

The architectural design and the artistic character of the fragment date it to the first half of the fourth century C.E. The comparative architectural material provides only a few parallels to our frieze, but the form of the medallions, the rendering of the figures and the subject itself find many parallels in mosaics of the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, particularly in Palestine. It seems that we have here another example of artistic renderings in varous media which were inspired in subject and style by a common source, perhaps the 'pattern-books'.[23]

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pp. 151–152, Pl. 25:1–2). On the other hand, there are many mosaics from the fourth to seventh centuries C.E. which display similar artistic features of the body; Avi-Yonah (above, n. 16, 1948), pp. 133–134 (*AAP*, pp. 53–54). For fourth-century examples, see Levi (above, n. 17), Pl. LVI:b; for dating, see *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 226. Similar wild animals appear in the synagogue at Yafa, dated to the third or early fourth century C.E.; E.L. Sukenik: The Ancient Synagogue at Yafa, near Nazareth, *Bulletin of the Rabinowitz Fund* 2 (1951), p. 17, Pl. IX. For cupids with frontal head and body and legs in profile, see M. Avi-Yonah: Oriental Elements in the Art of Palestine in the Roman and Byzantine Periods, I, *QDAP* 10 (1942), p. 131, Pl. XXVII:8 (*AAP*, p. 27, Pl. 6:8). The same types of hunters and animals appear in a mosaic from Bet Guvrin dated to the fourth century; Avi-Yonah (above, n. 17, 1932), No. 23, pp. 146–148 (*AAP*, pp. 293–295, Pl. 49). There are close parallels in the sixth-century mosaics of the monastery of Lady Mary at Beth Shean, especially Room L; G.M. FitzGerald: *A Sixth Century Monastery at Beth-Shean (Scythopolis)*, Philadelphia, 1939, p. 9, Pls. XVI–XVII. For a fairly close North African example, see J. Russell: Excavations at Anemurium, 1982, *Echos du monde classique* 27 (1983), p. 176, Pls. 6–9, 'interlocking circles and ellipses', with beasts and Christian motifs.

[19] J.J. Pollitt: *The Ancient View of Greek Art: Criticism, History and Terminology*, New Haven, 1974, pp. 160–162; for the East, see Avi-Yonah (above, n. 16, 1950), p. 77.

[20] R. Stuveras: *Le putto dans l'art romain*, Brussels, 1969; K.M.D. Dunbabin: *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 46–64; for hunting erotes, *ibid.*, pp. 81, 86. For Roman representations of the *venatio*, see I. Lavin: Antioch Hunting Mosaics and their Sources, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963), pp. 179–286; J.M.C. Toynbee: *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, London, 1973, pp. 17–25, 96–99, 181–182, 207–220; Levi (above, n. 17), Pl. LXXVII:a, c and for dating *ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 323–345; Glueck (above, n. 18). For a recently discovered hunting mosaic in Israel, see R. Cohen: A Byzantine Church and Mosaic Floor near Kissufim, *Qadmoniot* 45 (1979), pp. 19–24, front cover (Hebrew).

[21] L. Friedländer: *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms*, II, Leipzig, 1922, pp. 100–102.

[22] *Ḥadashot Arkheologiyot* 77 (1981), p. 30 (Hebrew). See also the hunting mosaic from Bet Guvrin mentioned above (n. 18).

[23] See O.J. Brendel: *Prolegomena to the Study of Roman Art*, New Haven, 1979, pp. 180–182; see also A. Kiss: Quelques monuments de la mosaïque en Pannonie, in Stern and Le Gay (above, n. 17), pp. 209–217, esp. pp. 214–215.

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III. THE GREEK INSCRIPTION*

The inscription was incised on the two fasciae of the lintel (Pl. 8:A). The length of the upper part of the inscription is about 2.1 m., that of the lower part is about 0.9 m. The average height of the letters is 8 cm.

ΕΠΙΦΛΚΥΝΤΙΑΝΟΥΤΟΥΛΑΜΠΡΚΟΜΚΑΙΔΟΥΚΟΣΤΟΑΠΑΝΤΗΤΗΡΙΝ
ΕΚΘΕΜΕΛΙΩΝΕΚΤΙCΘΗ

1. ἐπὶ Φλ(αουίου) Κυντιανοῦ τοῦ λαμπρ(οτάτου) κομ(ήτος) καὶ δουκὸς τὸ ἀπαντητήρι(ο)ν
2. ἐκ θεμελίων ἐκτίσθη

1. In the time of Flavius Kyntianos, the most illustrious *Comes* and *Dux*, the inn
2. was built from its foundations

The inscription is a foundation inscription of an inn or 'caravanserai' located near the city of Eleutheropolis (Bet Guvrin), on the main road between Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem) and Ascalon. The term ἀπαντητήριον, hostel or inn, is rather rare, but is found in sixth-century papyri.[24] The phrase ἐκ θεμελίων, 'from its foundations' is common in building inscriptions, showing that the building is entirely new, rather than restored or rebuilt.

Flavius Kyntianos, in whose term of office the inn was erected, was a *Comes* and *Dux* of the Provincia Palaestina. The *Dux* was the military commander of the province, as distinct from the civilian governor. This official post was initiated by the Emperor Diocletian (284–305 C.E.), during the administrative reforms by which he separated the military authority from the civilian.[25] The title *Comes* ('escort of the Emperor') is an honorary title, defining a distinguished personal status rather than an official post. This title was common from the days of Constantine (305–337 C.E.).[26] The epithet λαμπρότατος ('most illustrious') is the Greek equivalent of the Latin official rank *vir clarissimus*, a title which was given to the civil or military governors of the provinces, but it may also be an unofficial expression of honour, as it appears in many inscriptions and papyri.[27] This epithet also was commonly used from the fourth century onwards.

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* A shorter version of this section was published in Hebrew in Dagan (above, n. 1), pp. 75–76. I thank Mr. Dagan for supplying information and encouragement, and the Director of the Department of Antiquities and Museums, A. Eitan, for permission to publish the inscription.

[24] Liddell-Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon, s.v.* I have unfortunately been unable to examine the original publications.

[25] On the reforms of Diocletian, see e.g. W. Seston: *Dioclétian et la tétrarchie*, I, Paris, 1946; A.H.M. Jones: *The Later Roman Empire*, Norman, Oklahoma, 1964, pp. 42–52.

[26] See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 104–106.

[27] See, e.g., E. Littmann *et al.*: *Syria, Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904–5 and 1909*, Division III: *Greek and Latin Inscriptions*, Section A: *Southern Syria*, Leiden, 1921, Nos. 237, 560, 669, 670; C.J. Kraemer: *Excavations at Nessana*, III, Princeton, 1958, Nos. 26:18, 75:2; A. Negev: *The Greek Inscriptions from the Negev*, Jerusalem, 1981, pp. 91–92. For λαμπρότατος as *clarissimus*, see mainly P. Koch: *Die byzantinischen Beamtentitel, von 400 bis 700*, Jena,

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Similar formulae and titles have been found on building inscriptions in the Hauran, dating from the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth.[28] From the arguments mentioned above, we see that the inscription can hardly be earlier than the time of Constantine, in the first half of the fourth century. From the absence of crosses or any other Christian symbol on the lintel, we conclude that it cannot be much later than the end of this century. A date in the mid-fourth century seems to suit the inscription.

The inscription reveals to us a previously unknown official of the province of Palestine. The involvement of the military governor in a civilian project is typical of the overlapping between the activities of both authorities in the Byzantine period.

1903, pp. 10–22; O. Hornickel: *Ehren- und Rangprädikate in den Papyrusurkunden*, Giessen, 1930, pp. 22–27. I thank Prof. K. Holum for discussing this question with me.

[28] For example, see Littmann *et al.* (above, n. 27), No. 670 from Kefr in the Hauran, dating from year 287 of the era of Provincia Arabia (392 C.E.).

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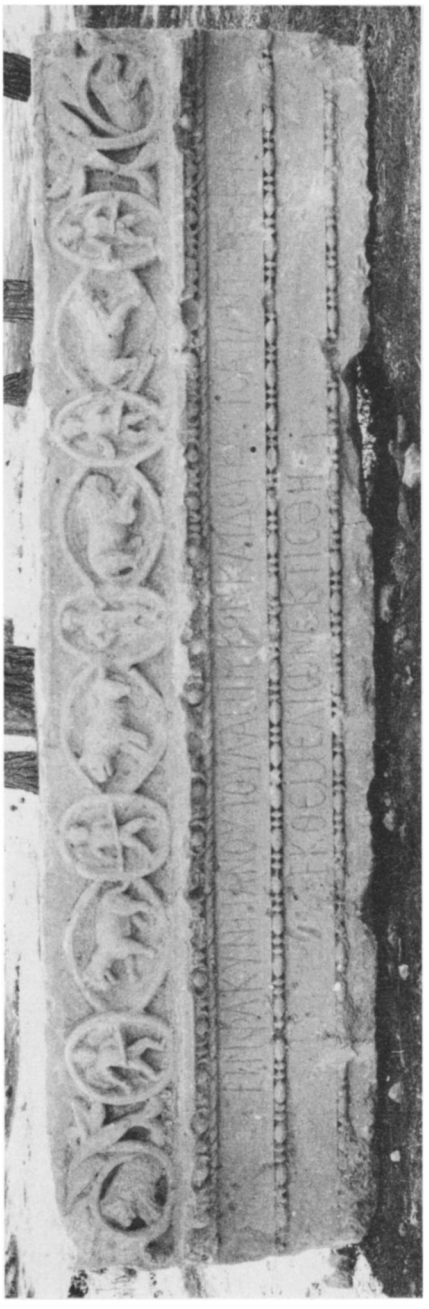
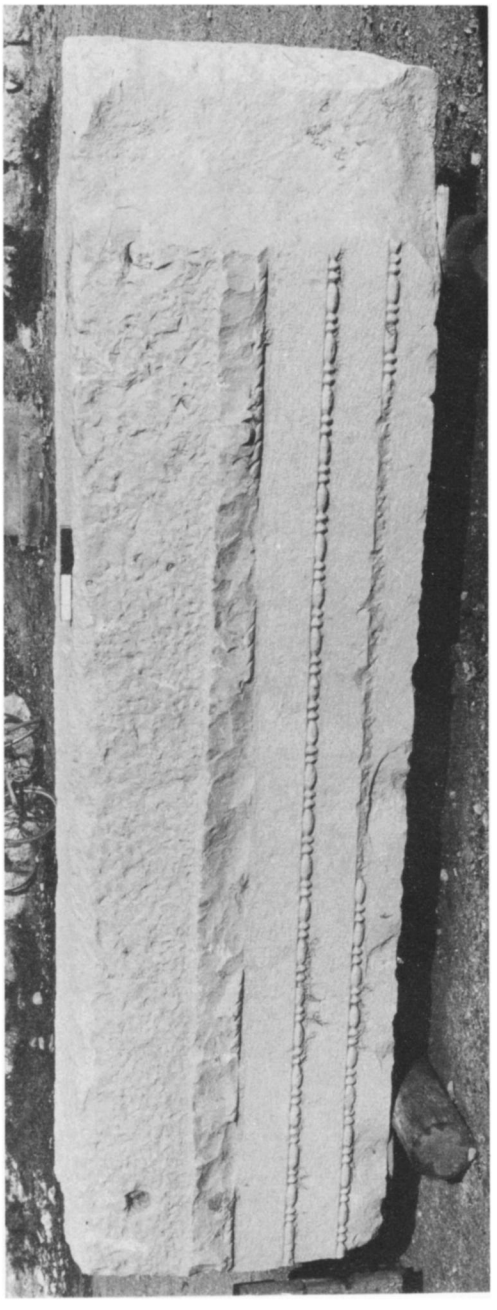
PLATE 8



A: The front of the lintel.



B: The back of the lintel.

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